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The Russian Giant Svyatogor and the Norse Útgartha-Loki

by NORA K. CHADWICK

THE giant hero Svyatogor is found in a small number of the oral narrative poems known as *byliny*, which are still current in north Russia, and in a few current Russian oral prose narratives. He is a strangely nebulous figure, and his origin and identity have evaded the curious scrutiny of scholars. He lacks the distinctive traits of Mikula the husbandman, who appears as his fellow-traveller in certain versions of the *byliny*. On the other hand he is in no sense a heroic figure, though he is brought into close association with Ilya of Murom, and also, sporadically, with other heroes of ancient Kiev and Novgorod, though the two latter associations are obviously adventitious. He resembles the giant of folk-tales, whose character seems to consist wholly of vast size and strength, though his strength is never represented as in actual use. He is definitely styled a giant (*velikan*) — one of the few supernatural beings who figure as heroes of *byliny* — and his name has been thought to mean 'Holy Mountain'. The stories associated with him — whether prose or verse — are wholly lacking in local associations or local colour. It is stated in several versions that 'he was not allowed in holy Russia: damp mother earth could not bear his weight'. He dwells in the north,

'On the lofty mountains, on the holy mountains', but his vast strength is a sorrow to him.

He was heavily burdened, as if with a grievous load,
He could not control his heroic strength,
And he threw away his steel club,
Which vanished out of sight above the clouds,
And caught it again in his white hand:
'If I should take to walking on the earth,
I would fasten a ring to heaven,
I would bind an iron chain to the ring,
I would drag the sky down to mother earth,

I would turn the earth on its end,
And I would confound earth with heaven.¹

A similar passage occurs in many versions.

If there were a pillar fixed in the earth,
And if there were a ring attached to the pillar,
I would turn the earth upside down.²

Yet no great achievements are attributed to him, and the stories which we possess represent him as ultimately balked, or in some way rendered impotent.

One story, which is found only in two prose versions, represents him as going to visit a smith whom he finds forging two fine hairs in a smithy under a great oak tree. The smith prophesies Svyatogor's marriage with a maiden in a country by the sea. Svyatogor goes on his travels, and discovers a maiden lying on a dung-heap whom he eventually marries. Further details of his marriage need not concern us here. This story occurs only in a prose version recited by Bogdanov to Rybnikov,³ though in a prose fragment recited by the elder Ryabinin to the same collector⁴ the same story is referred to in connection with Samson, who has taken the place of Svyatogor in this version.

A second story, which exists in two prose versions and one verse, relates to the intrigue of Svyatogor's wife with Ilya of Murom. One day, as Ilya is in the open plain, he sees a giant riding towards him. He conceals himself in a great oak, and presently the giant pauses and enters his white tent under the spreading tree, and after partaking of a meal he lies down in the tent and sleeps. His wife, meanwhile, leaves the tent and espies Ilya in the tree, and insists on his joining her, though the versions are not consistent as to Ilya's blamelessness in the matter. All are agreed, however, that Ilya exposes the lady's misconduct to the giant, and that Svyatogor slays her and swears brotherhood with Ilya by exchange of crosses, after which the two heroes ride on their way together. The variants differ slightly among themselves in certain details of the story. One version represents Svyatogor as carrying his wife in a crystal box, but others represent her as carried in his

¹ Rybnikov, *Pésni Sobrannýa*, ed. Gruzinski, Vol. I, Moscow, 1909, p. 6.

² Hilferding, *Oneshskýa Byliny*, Vol. II, St Petersburg, 1894, p. 665; cf. *ibid.*, III, p. 374; etc.

³ Vol. I, p. 321, footnote 3.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

pouch or bag, and after her intrigue with Ilya she secretes him also in the bag with her. In this event exposure comes about by Svyatogor's horse complaining of having to carry three people instead of two. In the version recited by Menshikov to Hilferding,⁵ though the order of events is not clear, it seems that Ilya himself arouses the giant from sleep, whereupon the giant thrusts Ilya into his pouch or pocket, though whether he does so consciously or not is not stated. Menshikov's version is of considerable importance,⁶ and I shall have occasion to refer to it later.

A third incident relates to a bag which Svyatogor is unable to lift. In the majority of versions the giant is represented as boasting of his vast strength, after which he finds a little bag in the road which he is unable to raise from the ground. In some versions his boast and his failure are shared by two other giant heroes, e.g. Samson and Kolyvan. The dénouement comes about in various ways. In some versions the giants hear a voice from heaven telling them that the bag contains the weight of the whole world. In others the little bag is the property of the peasant Mikula who is carrying it along the road, vainly pursued by Svyatogor. When at last the giant comes up with him he is unable to lift the bag which Mikula carries so easily. Both these versions may be said to contain a cautionary or tendentious element. In Menshikov's version the bag containing the weight of the world is not mentioned, but here the hero Ilya is represented as pursuing the giant Svyatogor whom he overtakes with difficulty, and who subsequently carries the hero for two days in his pocket. This version seems to be a confusion of three motifs: (1) a pursuit of Svyatogor by Ilya of Murom who has great difficulty in overtaking him; (2) the finding of the giant Svyatogor asleep in a white tent by Ilya, who has great difficulty in awakening him; (3) the giant thrusts the hero into his pocket.

Yet another story relates to the death of Svyatogor in the fatal tomb. As he and Ilya ride over the mountains they come upon a great stone tomb or coffin, which they learn is destined for whomsoever it shall fit. When Svyatogor lies down in the tomb, and Ilya places the lid in position, he is unable to raise it again. Ilya strikes it with the giant's sword, but where he strikes iron bands appear,

⁵ *Oneshskya Byliny*, Vol. III, p. 382 ff.

⁶ The value of Menshikov's version is recognized by Professor Mazon, who refers to it as a 'version assez complète, précise et sobre'. (See Mazon's paper 'Svyatogor le Géant', *Revue des Études Slaves*, Vol. XII, 1932, p. 163).

imprisoning the giant yet more securely. As the giant dies a slaver issues from his mouth. Through a narrow aperture in the tomb he breathes some of his heroic strength into Ilya, and begs to be allowed to breathe upon him a second time; but Ilya refuses him, and Svyatogor tells him that had he been allowed to breathe on him with his full dying force Ilya would have perished, for his is the breath of death. Thereupon the giant dies and Ilya rides away.

One other story may be mentioned, which exists in two versions only, one in prose and one in verse. This is the visit of Ilya to Svyatogor's father. In the version recited by the elder Ryabinin to Rybnikov⁷ this is a prose fragment standing alone. It does not appear to be in any way connected with the death of Svyatogor, since the giant himself invites Ilya to visit him in his own home, and actually accompanies him. He warns Ilya that when he shall introduce him to his father, who is old and blind, Ilya must not shake hands, but must heat a bar of iron, and place this in the old man's hand instead. Ilya does so, and the old man exclaims at the fierceness of his grip.

In the version recited by Kalinin to Hilferding,⁸ the incident is closely connected with the death of Svyatogor in the fatal tomb. The dying giant sends Ilya to his father to beg him to send him his blessing. Here also the father is old and blind. When Ilya tells him of the fate which has befallen his son, the old man accuses Ilya of having slain him, and deals a mighty blow at him with his club; but Ilya evades it, and the old man relents and gives his blessing, and Ilya returns to Svyatogor. On receiving the paternal blessing the giant dies.

I suspect that Svyatogor's blind old father is not unconnected with the prophetic smith, visited by Svyatogor before his marriage. In the version recited by Ryabinin, of which Kalinin's is merely a variant, it is clear that there must have been a furnace and a bar of iron at hand. Is it not probable that the smith in Bogdanov's version and in Ryabinin's 'Samson' is in reality Svyatogor's father? If so, it would be more natural that the giant should go to him to seek to know his future, and the old man's blindness would be better accounted for if it was combined with the prophetic gift.

Of equal importance with the actual subjects of the narratives are certain stock formulae which recur in slightly variant forms in

⁷ *Pésni*, I, p. 8 f.

⁸ *Onezhskiya Byliny*, Vol. I, p. 4 ff.

several versions. The first of these is the statement that Svyatogor was not allowed in Holy Russia — 'Damp mother earth could not bear his weight.' The second is that he could not control his heroic strength. The third is obscure, and varies in the actual formula used, but it seems to suggest that if Heaven and earth were connected by a pillar or by an iron bar to which was attached a chain and a ring, the hero by means of them would pull down the heavens and pull up the earth from its foundations, thus subverting the material universe — a kind of Russian parallel to the Old Norse conception of *Ragna-rök*. This feature may be regarded as the most important and characteristic which we possess relating to Svyatogor.

Like the *byliny* of Mikula, all these versions, prose and verse alike, have been recorded only in the north of Russia in Europe; but motifs similar to most of the stories are found widespread in folk-tales elsewhere. In seeking the affinities of these stories, therefore, we must ask ourselves whether in the literature of any other period or locality we find not only parallel incidents, but a parallel series of incidents in a similar relationship to one another. Can we trace the cycle as a whole elsewhere?

In the Icelandic prose work known as *Gylfaginning*, 'the Beguiling of Gylfi', composed by the Icелander, Snorri Sturluson († c. 1240) there is a coherent and fairly complete story which contains parallels to most of the incidents connected with Svyatogor. This story relates to the visit paid by the god Thor, in company with his two thralls, the boy Thjálfi and the girl Röskva, and also the god Loki, to the abode of the giant Útgarta-Loki, who first appears in the story in disguise, under the name Skrímir. In this story Thor plays a part parallel to that of Ilya of Murom in the stories which we have just been considering, and the rôle of Svyatogor in the latter is filled by the giant Skrímir (Útgarta-Loki).

The Norse story as narrated in *Gylfaginning*, Chapter 45, relates that Thor and Loki are on a journey, and come at night to the house of a farmer (*bóndi*) where they pass the night. Next morning when Thor continues his journey, he takes with him Thjálfi and Röskva, the son and daughter of the farmer, as his slaves. All four now proceed eastwards over the sea to Jötunheimr ('abode of giants') till they come to a great forest. When it grows

dark they creep into what they take to be a great hall to sleep; but their sleep is disturbed by strange noises, and when morning dawns Thor discovers that a giant lies asleep hard by in a wood, and the rumbling has been caused by his snoring. Thor raises his hammer and is about to strike the giant when he awakes. He tells them that his name is Skrímir, and proposes that they shall travel together. When Skrímir seizes his glove (*hanzka*) Thor perceives that it is the hall in which he and his companions have passed the night. When Skrímir has breakfasted, he places all the food in one bag and lays it on his back and strides ahead throughout the day, 'and stepped with very great strides'; but late in the evening they all lie down to sleep under a great oak. Skrímir bids Thor unloose the provision bag and help himself and his companions to the contents, but he is unable to unloosen the knots of the fastening. He seizes his hammer and strikes the sleeping giant three times with all his might. At the third stroke the sleeping giant awakes. He then directs Thor and his companions on their way to the dwelling of Útgarta-Loki, and he himself departs. When they come to the hall of Útgarta-Loki they are entertained with games and contests, in which the giant's retainers take part. Útgarta-Loki informs them that the giant Skrímir is no other than himself in disguise, and that the reason why Thor could not open the giant's bag was because the giant had bound it with iron.

Snorri's story is not well remembered. After the introduction of the peasant girl Röskva into the story we hear no more of her, and the part which she originally played has evidently been forgotten. Moreover the two sleeps of Skrímir on two successive nights, the first 'in the forest', the second 'under a spreading oak' look like duplications of a single episode. On both nights Thor makes an attempt to kill him with his hammer, and on both he fails. On both occasions the giant's provision bag is brought into prominence, and though the first mention is obscure, it seems to bear some relation to Thor, as the second does clearly. It would seem on the whole not improbable that two versions, differing slightly from one another, have been amalgamated.

Elsewhere the same Icelandic author tells another story which has much in common with the story already discussed. This story occurs in Chapter 18 of the *Skáldskaparmál* ('The Diction of Poetry'), the second part of Snorri's *Prose Edda* which, like the

Gylfaginning, is a rich storehouse of early Norse traditions and myths. The story to which I refer relates how Thor and Loki pay a visit to the hall of Geirröðr the Giant. They are entertained with games and contests as in the last story, but here we are told that there are great fires the whole length of the hall, and there are also iron pillars. The giant takes up a glowing bar of iron with the tongs, and casts it at Thor. Thor catches hold of it with his iron gloves, and brandishes it, but Geirröðr leaps behind an iron pillar to save himself, and when Thor throws the bar it passes through the pillar, and through Geirröðr, and through the wall. The *mise en scène*, with its furnaces, its bar of red hot iron, and its tongs suggests a great smithy rather than a hall. The iron pillar is also to be noted.

Snorri's is by no means the only version of this story known to us from Norse or Icelandic tradition, though it is one of the most complete. The same story is told also in a portion of an incomplete and difficult poem known as the *Thorsdrápa*,⁹ composed by Eilífr Guthrúnarson, who lived in the second half of the tenth century. This poem, which is one of Snorri's chief sources for the story, relates the visit of the god Thor, accompanied by Þjálfi, to the abode of Geirröðr the giant. Þjálfi is so small in comparison to Thor that he is able to ford a river on the way to Geirröðr's dwelling seated on the strap of Thor's shield. Geirröðr's dwelling is referred to both as a hall and a cave; the roof is supported by an ancient pillar, and we hear of a forge on which lies a glowing bar of metal. Thor's visit is described as frankly hostile, and something in the nature of a battle between Thor and Geirröðr's retainers seems to take place before Thor enters the cavern. Here also we are told that Geirröðr, who is clearly pictured as a smith, picks up a mass of glowing iron from the anvil and hurls it at Thor, and that Thor catches it as it flies, and slays Geirröðr with it.

References to the story also occur in other early poems. Two verses of a lost poem, also utilized by Snorri, are still extant, in which reference is made to the Giant's approach to Geirröðr's dwelling; and the incident was also known to the poet Úlfr Uggason, who lived c. 1000, and who refers to it in one of his poems.¹⁰ We may refer also to a verse contained in Chapter 60 of the *Saga of Harold Harthráði* († 1066) which shows that the story

⁹ *Skáldskaparmál*, Chapter 18.

¹⁰ *Skáldskaparmál*, Chapter 4.

was widely known, and in which Geirröthr is referred to as the 'giant of the big bellows', i.e. obviously a smith.¹¹

A variant version of the story is found also in the *Saga of Thorsteinn Bæjarmagn*,¹² which relates the visit of a mortal called Thorsteinn to the abode of Geirröthr, who is here referred to as a king. Setting out from the court of King Olaf Tryggvason, Thorsteinn and his followers sail eastward across the Baltic and find themselves in a long fjord, by the shore of an unknown land. Thorsteinn leaves his men behind and goes up through the forest, passing the night in a great oak. Presently three men of giant stature pass beneath, and the chief of them, whose name is Gothmundr, consents to take Thorsteinn behind him on his horse to the abode of King Geirröthr. Arrived at Geirröthr's dwelling, a stone hall or chamber is assigned to the party to sleep in, while Gothmundr is taken to the feast in Geirröthr's hall. It is not stated that any food is given to his followers that night, but on the two succeeding days games and contests of skill take place. Finally Thorsteinn slays Geirröthr.

It will be seen that in this version the mortal Thorsteinn has taken the place of the god Thor in Snorri's version, while Gothmundr has taken the place of the giant Skrímir. Thorsteinn, however, like Thjálf in the *Thorsdrápa*, is represented as extremely tiny, while Gothmundr, like Thor in the latter poem, has assumed giant proportions. As in Snorri's version, a lodging is assigned to Thorsteinn and his companions by their giant guide, but it is not stated that any victuals are provided for them, though we are told that Gothmundr himself feasts in Geirröthr's hall. Here, as in Snorri's version, games take place in Geirröthr's dwelling, and here, as in the *Thorsdrápa*, and other Norse and Danish versions, Geirröthr is slain by his visitor.

The Danish historian, Saxo Grammaticus, who lived and wrote c. 1200, records a tradition¹³ of visits paid by a mortal named Thor-kell (*Thorkillus*) and a number of companions, to Geirröthr (*Geruthus*) the giant, and to Útgarttha-Loki (*Ugarthilocus*), who is here stated to be a god. The party sails to further Permland, i.e.

¹¹ *Flateyjarbók*, Vol. III, Christiania, 1868, p. 417.

¹² *Formanna Sögur*, Vol. III, Copenhagen, 1827, p. 175 ff.

¹³ *Danish History*, Book VIII, p. 344 f. My references are to Elton's translation (London, 1894) as being more convenient to English readers; but the original text has been consulted throughout.

north Russia, and after various adventures they come upon a gloomy town where everything is foul and stinking, and murky and misshapen phantoms are seen moving about. The entrance to Geirröthr's rocky palace is narrow, and they enter in close file. Inside the house is filled with smoke and soot, and the floor is crawling with snakes, while an acrid stench assails the nostrils. The seats are of iron. Weird games and contests are in progress. Geirröthr himself is seen to be an old man, seated on a lofty seat, his body pierced through, while three women occupy adjoining seats. Thorkell tells his companions that long ago the god Thor drove red hot irons through the vitals of Geirröthr. The place is strewn with treasures, but those who touch them never return to the light of day, and it is with difficulty that the survivors of the party make their escape. On a subsequent occasion Thorkell again visits the same region, and again sees a cavern entered by a narrow defile, and two black giants feeding a fire. Again we are told that everything is grimy and filthy, while snakes crawl on the floor.

Thorkell now proceeds on his way to the abode of Útgarttha-Loki, which is located in a great rock. Inside all is darkness. Thorkell has to stoop his body through the narrow jaws of the cavern, where he beholds a number of iron seats among a swarm of gliding serpents. Beyond, in a foul and gloomy room, they see Útgarttha-Loki, laden hand and foot with enormous chains. Each of his reeking hairs is large and stiff. When Thorkell plucks one from his chin a stench fills the room. He and his companions make their way out, bespattered with poison from the snakes which dart at them from every side. The demons hang furiously over them, casting poisonous slaver on them which kills or blinds whomsoever it touches.

There can be no doubt that the Norse and Danish stories are merely variants of a single tradition, despite the fact that the Danish story contains a specific reference to the Norse. In Snorri's prose paraphrase a god named Thor, in the Danish version a mortal named Thorkell, each make journeys to north Russia — the ancient Bjarmaland of the sagas — to visit Geirröthr and Útgarttha-Loki. In both versions the former is a giant, and in Norse the latter is also a giant. In the Danish version he is a god, but he does not appear to differ from the giants visited by Thorkell. In both stories Geirröthr's abode has features in common with a smithy,

though in Saxo's account this is obscured, perhaps from confusion with Útgarta-Loki, perhaps because these features have been transferred to the second cave of giants visited by Thorkell. In both versions games or contests of skill are in progress at the abode of Geirröthr, and in both allusion is made to a bar of red hot iron which Thor drives through the vitals of Geirröthr. In the Danish version Útgarta-Loki is bound hand and foot to a rock by iron chains. This feature does not appear in Snorri's version of our story, but in Chapter 50 of *Gylfaginning*, where the god Loki is depicted as suffering punishment for the death of Balder, he is represented as lying above three slabs of stone set on end, through which holes have been drilled, and to which he is bound by means of the entrails of one of his sons, 'and those bonds were turned to iron,' while a snake drips venomous slaver on his face. His wife Sigyn holds a bowl above his head to catch the venom, but when the bowl becomes full, and Sigyn withdraws it to empty it, some of the venomous slaver drops over his face, and then Loki writhes so that the earth shakes. 'There he lies in bonds till Ragna-rök.'¹⁴ Elsewhere we are told that Loki shall escape from his bonds when the final catastrophe comes, when the gods perish, and heaven and earth are confounded.

It will be seen that the Norse stories which we have been considering have certain elements in common with the Russian *byliny* of Svyatogor. In the story which narrates the visit of Thor and his companions to the hall of Útgarta-Loki, Skrímir's glove, in which the hero and his companions pass the night, corresponds to Svyatogor's pouch in which Ilya and Svyatogor's wife are enclosed, while in both stories the giant lies asleep under the oak. In the corresponding incident in the variant of Snorri's story contained in the *Saga of Thorsteinn Bæjarmagn*, the hero, Thorsteinn, hides in the oak when the giant approaches, just as Ilya does. In the *Thorsteinn's Saga*, the hero is unaccompanied, but we have seen that in Snorri's version a peasant girl, Röskva, spends the night in Thor's company in the glove, though two others are present also. This part of Snorri's version appears to be confused in several respects, and Röskva's original part in the story has been obscured, but we may suspect that she stands in somewhat the same relation to Thor that Svyatogor's wife does to Ilya of Murom.

¹⁴ *Gylfaginning*, Chapter 50.

Both, it will be noted, belong, apparently, to the agricultural or farmer class.¹⁵

When Skrímir awakens he seizes the glove in which Thor has passed the night and fraternizes with him, as Svyatogor carries the wallet (or, in one version, the crystal box) and fraternizes with Ilya, and in both stories the giant and the hero (in Norse a god) travel forward together. Both Skrímir and Svyatogor carry their bags, and the speed of both is emphasized. Thor is unable to avail himself of the contents of Skrímir's bag because he cannot unloosen the strings. These, he learns subsequently, are made of iron. This part of the Norse story seems to correspond to the *bylina* generally called Mikula and Svyatogor, in which the giant is unable to overtake the peasant hero or to lift his bag — surely a reversal of the natural order and a sophistication. Still more closely it corresponds to the version of Ilya and Svyatogor recited by Menshikov to Hilferding, in which, despite the disintegrated condition of the narrative, it is clear that Ilya has been pursuing Svyatogor; that he arouses him with successive blows as he is asleep in a white tent; and that on awakening, Svyatogor encloses Ilya in his pouch. Here the speed is ascribed not to the hero but to the giant, who is also the owner of the bag or pouch, and this would seem to be more natural.

In short the Norse picture of the giant asleep in the forest (and under an oak) while Thor and Röskva and their companions sleep in the glove would seem to correspond to the Russian episode of Svyatogor asleep in his tent under an oak,¹⁶ while Ilya and Svyatogor's wife¹⁷ take their pleasure hard by, and Thor's repeated blows are reproduced in Menshikov's version in the statement that

¹⁵ This seems to be the natural inference from Bogdanov's version, which is our chief source for the Russian story. In Ryabinin's 'Samson', Svyatogor's wife is said to be a daughter of Luke the kaléka. She lives by the sea shore in the north of Russia — '*v Pomorskom tsarstvê*,' which presumably refers to the Arctic shore east of the White Sea.

¹⁶ We may refer to the prose versions recited by Bogdanov to Rybnikov (*Pěsni*, Vol. I, p. 318 ff.) and by Romanov to the same collector (*ibid.* p. 290 ff.). In this version, instead of his shoulder bag, Svyatogor carries a crystal chest on his shoulders. It is interesting to note that in the Norse story of Geirröðr the giant related in the *Skáldskaparmál*, Chapter 18, Loki had paid an earlier visit to Geirröðr than the one related above, and on this occasion Geirröðr had imprisoned him for three months in a chest.

¹⁷ In the version recited by Gurbin to Hilferding, Ilya's female companion whom the giant (here called Samson) carries with Ilya in his pouch is called a *polénitsa* (*Sbornik*, III, p. 374), i.e. kind of amazon.

Ilya hit the giant 'hard, very hard, over and over again' before he could awaken him. The long strides of Skrímir as he travels in the company of Thor correspond to the curious statement in Menshikov's version that 'the hero (i.e. Svyatogor) always rides ahead of him' (i.e. of Ilya). After the long day's travel Skrímir finds his companions' night quarters under a spreading oak. This part of Snorri's version doubtless corresponds to Menshikov's version, for we are told in the latter that they pitched a tent of white linen, and the giant and Ilya began to seek repose. On waking, Skrímir directs Thor on his way, mocking his puny size, whereas Svyatogor, on waking, thrusts Ilya into his pouch.

In certain points the tradition preserved in the *Saga of Thorsteinn Bæjarmagn* is closer than Snorri's version to the Russian story. Like Ilya Thorsteinn is unaccompanied, and like Ilya he is hiding in the branches of a great oak when the giant rides up. Like Ilya he descends and fraternizes with the giant. Like Ilya he continues his journey in the giant's company, and like him he is stowed away behind the giant on his horse. In the *Thorsteinns Saga* the text implies that Thorsteinn, like Ilya, is supperless while the giant feasts; but it would be unwise to stress so common a motif of all giant stories.

After this episode the Russian story passes to the scene at the fatal tomb, where the giant is to be imprisoned for ever in the stone chamber bound with hoops of iron. In the Norse story as presented to us by Snorri, the subsequent picture of the giant Skrímir in his proper person of Útgarta-Loki has little in common with the Russian; but if we turn to the Danish account of the visit of Thorkell to Útgarta-Loki as we find it in Saxo, and to the closely connected account of Loki in *Gylfaginning*, Chapter 50, bound to three rocks by iron bonds till Ragna-rök, with a snake dropping venom on to his face, we shall see that the fate of Útgarta-Loki (and Loki) is not so remote from that of Svyatogor as might appear at first sight. The chief difference lies in the fact that in the Norse descriptions we are introduced to the interior of the tomb, while in the Russian we see it only from outside. In both cases the giant or supernatural being has entered a stone chamber through which only a narrow aperture remains, and in this he is imprisoned. In both cases he is bound by iron bonds or chains, but in the Russian version these have been transferred to the exterior,

and appear binding the lid to the tomb when Ilya strikes it.¹⁸ In both a fatal slaver or breath issues from the giant or from the snakes within the tomb in which he is imprisoned. In both the scene is laid in Russia. In both the giant will subvert the material universe if his strength is not controlled by some external agency, such as imprisonment, with all additional security of stone walls and iron bonds or chains. In both he is thought of as being in the same region, i.e. outside 'holy Russia', the Christian Slavonic Russia of the Dnêpr, and confined to heathen Perm in the far north.¹⁹

We may now see more relevance in the points regarding Svyatogor which have always been puzzling and far from self-explanatory in the Russian story. The curious statement that he could not restrain his heroic strength seems to be connected with his restriction from entering holy Russia or walking on damp mother earth who could not bear his force, and with his strange speech about confounding earth with heaven by dragging at an iron ring and chain attached to a great pillar.

It will be seen that these attributes are more appropriate to Útgarta-Loki and Loki than to anything which the Russian sources have to tell us of Svyatogor. In Norse tradition the welfare of the world lasts only so long as Loki's strength is forcibly controlled, and this is done by iron bars or chains attached to rings in the rock or stones set on end. When he shall break these bonds, that is to say when he shall regain control of his strength, Ragnarök will come about. In Norse Útgarta-Loki is a duplicate of Loki in some respects; but he is not identical with Loki. He is the Loki of Útgarthar. The term *Útgarthar* is technically used in Norse mythology to denote regions beyond the inhabited world; but *Gartha-riki* is the Norse name for Russia, and in another passage Saxo²⁰ uses Útgarth (*Útgarthia*) for a definite locality in or neighbouring on Russia. It is significant that Snorri represents Thor and his party as journeying eastwards, then crossing the sea, and, after

¹⁸ Hilferding, *Onezhskya Byliny*, III, p. 382 ff., line 73; Rybnikov, *Pêsmi*, I, p. 322 f.

¹⁹ The phrase 'not in holy Russia' may, however, perhaps refer to his imprisonment in the tomb which I have shown reason to regard as originally underground; for the *stikh* of Egori Khrabry, or St George recited in Russia by the *kaléki perekhozhie* or itinerant singers of religious poetry, the saint is buried for thirty years in a deep pit, and is accordingly spoken of as 'no longer in holy Russia, and unable to see the white light or gaze upon the red sun.' See Bezsonov, *Kaléki Perekhozhie*, Vol. I, p. 440 ff.

²⁰ Book IX, p. 377.

landing, travelling eastwards through the forest. The region which he has in mind appears to be either Finland or the ancient Perm, the northern part of Russia, known throughout Norse literature as 'Bjarmaland'. This region would not be regarded as any part of 'holy Russia' in the twelfth century. It is significant that Saxo locates Útgarttha-Loki in the same region.

One curious feature of the Danish picture of Útgarttha-Loki is that of the hair; when this is plucked from his beard a fearful stench issues. I cannot help associating this feature, and the prominence of the iron seats within his prison, with the story of Svyatogor's visit to the smith whom he finds forging two fine hairs in a smithy under a great tree.²¹ The whole of this episode in the Svyatogor Cycle is held to be adventitious,²² chiefly because it is found only in the version recited by Bogdanov, an old man of seventy with a defective memory, and in another version from the same village.²³ But Bogdanov's age would make it probable that his repertoire would be more comprehensive than perfect, and while his memory of individual texts was not unnaturally defective, he would probably have known in youth many versions with which a younger generation would be unacquainted. Be this as it may, we have seen that in Norse tradition Geirröðr is pictured as a smith and the interior of his hall as a smithy, and I suspect that this episode in Bogdanov's story is an original feature of the Svyatogor Cycle.

More important for our purpose is the parallel of the visit of Ilya to Svyatogor's father with that of Thor (Thorsteinn, Thorkell) to Geirröðr. Here also, it will be remembered, great fires are burning in the hall, and in the *Thórsdrápa* and the other poetical fragments we hear of an anvil, bellows, and a great pillar which supports the roof. Geirröðr flings a bar of red-hot iron at Thor, who evades it and seizes it in his iron gloves and flings it back at the giant. In Ryabinin's version of the Russian story any aggressive action taken by the old man has been forgotten, though it may be assumed that Ilya, like Thor, must have worn an iron glove, since he hands a bar of red-hot iron to the giant. In Kalinín's version, however, where

²¹ Rybnikov, *Pésni*, Vol. I, p. 321, note 3.

²² Mazon, *loc. cit.*, p. 176.

²³ The visit of the giant to the smithy is mentioned in the *bylina* recorded by Rybnikov, *Pésni*, Vol. I, p. 6; but here Svyatogor is identified with the Biblical hero Samson.

the incident of the iron is omitted, the old man flings his heroic club at Ilya with a mighty throw, which Ilya succeeds in evading. The two accounts are doubtless supplementary and closely parallel to the Norse. It may be added that in certain Norse variants of this contest between Thor and Geirröthr, the giant is represented as blinded,²⁴ like Svyatogor's father.

Exact correspondence between the eastern and the western tradition is, of course, hardly to be looked for. The versions of Snorri and Saxo date from the twelfth century, while the Norse poetical versions are much earlier. Moreover Saxo's version is found in northern Europe, while the Norse versions have come to us from a remote island in the north Atlantic. To these regions they travelled by oral transmission through many intermediaries, apparently, like many other Norse stories, from the north of Russia, before they were written down. The Russian stories, on the other hand, whatever their early history,²⁵ may be presumed to have had a life in oral tradition for some centuries before they were recorded in a district not very remote from the scene of Svyatogor's exploits. During recent years at least they have been current in a peasant milieu, and have no doubt suffered, to some extent, like many of the *byliny*, from the influence of the *skazki*, or folk-tales. This influence has tended to obscure many of the original features, which are gradually approximating to well-known folk-tale motifs. But the work of disintegration and assimilation has not yet gone far enough to obscure the original relationship of the story of Svyatogor with the Norse and Danish tradition.

What is the nature of the relationship of the Russian story to the Norse? The Norse tradition would seem to be ancient, since the connection of Skrímir with Thor is referred to in a stanza quoted in *Egils Saga* (Chapter 24) and attributed to Kveldúlf, the grandfather of Egill Skallagrimson, who died not later than 900. Moreover we have a reference to Thor's failure to open Skrímir's bag in an Old Norse poem known as *Lokasenna*, contained in the Codex Regius manuscript, and believed to date from the second half of the

²⁴ In the 'fictitious' *Saga of Thorsteinn Bæjarmagn* referred to above, Thorsteinn threw sparks into the eyes of Geirröthr and then throws a bar of the material with which he has made the sparks, i.e. apparently his flint and steel, into his eyes, so that he falls down dead.

²⁵ Many of the themes associated with Svyatogor are said to be found in Old Slavonic written sources. See Mazon, *loc. cit.*, p. 195 ff.

tenth century.²⁶ Other early references and texts have been cited already.

Again, the fact that both Snorri and Saxo locate their story in Russia is important. Moreover, the scene of the interior of the tomb of Útgarta-Loki in the latter bears a striking similarity to many of the interiors of the heathen temples of north Russia as consistently described in the Old Norse *Saga of St Olaf*, and the series of 'fictitious' prose sagas known as the *Fornaldar Sögur*. We may refer to the occurrence of snakes, of poisonous slaver, to the general foulness, and the tomb-like interior. These 'temples' appear to have been in the nature of burial chambers or barrows, at least in some instances (e.g. in *St Olaf's saga*). Reference to the genealogies of the Norsemen who are represented in the sagas as taking part in these expeditions to north Russia to visit — generally to raid — these barrows points consistently to the ninth century as the period when they were still in use. If Professor Mazon is right in concluding that the name *Svyatogor* is derived from the Russian words *svyaty gory*, 'holy mountains', or 'holy hills', and that it was originally a local name which was eventually transferred to the giant; and if, moreover, I am right in suggesting that this giant is to be identified with the Norse giant and the Danish god Útgarta-Loki, who is imprisoned in one of these stone chambers, is it not possible that the name Svyatogor retains the tradition of one of these holy hills or sacred chambers?

But in the absence of a critical examination of the Norse evidence relating to these tomb-temples or barrows, any suggestion that the stories of Útgarta-Loki originated in a cult must be regarded as mere speculation. In the meantime, however, the Norse and the Danish parallels enable us to conclude with great probability that the majority at least of the stories of Svyatogor are surviving episodes from an ancient narrative or cycle of considerable proportions. The fact that the scene of both Snorri's and Saxo's stories is laid in northern Russia must have some significance. Russian tradition, as represented in the stories of Svyatogor, points to the same region, though of course it gives us no information as to date. Again, it is perhaps not without significance that in the Russian versions the proportion of prose to verse is unusually large, as in

²⁶ E. Mogk, *Geschichte der Norwegisch-Isländischen Literatur*, Strassburg, 1904, p. 597.

Norse narrative literature. I have already commented on the fact that the stories and *byliny* of Svyatogor have been recorded only from north Russia, where Scandinavian influence was paramount in early times. The evidence on the whole, therefore seems to suggest that the stories relating to Svyatogor are derived from a myth which was once well known and widespread over the whole of northern Russia, where it was current at least as early as the twelfth century, and perhaps much earlier. From this region it was carried to Iceland and Denmark, where it was preserved in a coherent form, owing to the fact that it was written down at an early date by two excellent scholars. In the region of its origin its history is obscure, but there can be little doubt that it has been carried on for some centuries by oral tradition, and has not unnaturally reached us in a condition of disintegration which renders it difficult to arrange the fragments in their proper order and to reconstruct the narrative, though with the help of the Norse parallels such a reconstruction does not seem to me to be impossible.

One final question remains to be asked. How does it come about that adventures which seem to have been attributed in early times to the Norse god Thor have come to be attributed in modern times in north Russia to Ilya of Murom? To discuss this question fully would require more space than I have at my disposal; but the following observations perhaps point to a possible explanation. We know that Ilya of Murom has become confused in the popular conception with St Elias, and has gradually appropriated some of his attributes. We know, moreover, that St Elias has, in his turn, appropriated some of the attributes of the early Russian god Perun, from whom he is believed to have derived his power over thunder and lightning. Perun is generally regarded as the Slavonic equivalent of the old Norse thunder god Thor.²⁷ It is quite possible, therefore, that in the original form of the Russian story it was not Ilya of Murom, but the god Perun who figured as the companion and successor of Svyatogor, and who finally succeeded in destroying his dangerous and harmful power.

²⁷ The name *Perun*, 'thunder-bolt,' is probably connected with the Lithuanian *Perkunas*, 'thunder', though the loss of the *k* is difficult to explain. *Perkunas* is philologically connected with Old Norse *Fjörgyn*, the name of Thor's mother.